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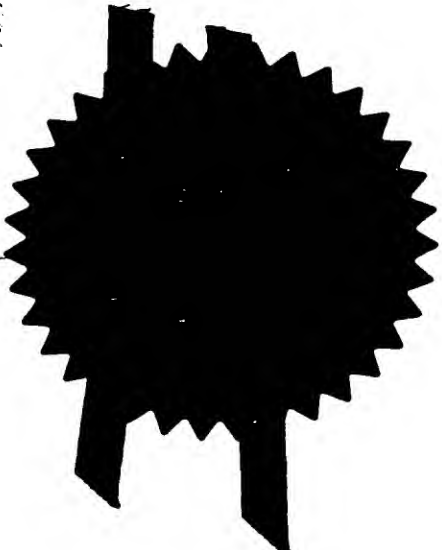
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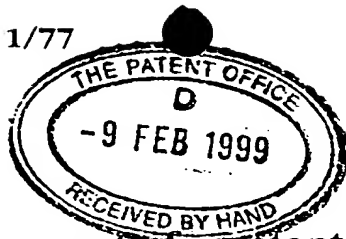
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- 9 FEB 1999

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DANIEL NORRIS  
24 STANHOPE AVE  
FINCHLEY  
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Patents ADP number (if you know it)

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the  
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7599145001

4. Title of the invention

A SMALL-SCALE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom  
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# A SMALL-SCALE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

## THE FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention provides a new way to facilitate meetings, conferences and forums. It may be used as a form of entertainment or to enhance restaurants, cafés, Internet cafés, public houses, bars and nightclubs and other leisure facilities. This invention may be used to provide social and community forums. It may be used to facilitate conferences, networking sessions, training sessions, educational programmes and public consultations. The invention may be utilized by market researchers to constitute study groups for qualitative research. The invention may also be used for media events and information gathering processes that require direct access to public opinion.

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The Internet makes it easy for participants to set-up and join forum groups to communicate with other participants who share interests. No facility yet exists, that provides a structured framework, which enables participants to do this, **in person**. This invention is a **programmable forum**. It is a facility that enables people to meet, talk and exchange ideas within a structured and responsive framework.

## THE INVENTION

The invention is a facility that enables participants to meet (in person), talk and exchange ideas within a structured and modifiable framework. The invention is a programmable forum that includes **discussion topic signs**.

In the context of this invention a forum group is defined as a group of participants who wish to pursue a particular discussion or conversation. Embodiments of this invention are set up in such a way as to enable participants to gather together to form forum groups. Accommodation may therefore be provided to enable members of forum groups to sit together. Discussion topic signs are arranged within embodiments of this invention in such a way that they indicate the type of discussion or conversation that forum groups wish to pursue. Discussion topic signs are used to display discussion topics or themes or conversation topics or themes. Discussion topic signs may use any means, any materials or any form of technology to display these things.

Participants are free to join any forum group, to change groups or to set up new ones. A new forum group can be set up by displaying a new topic on a **discussion topic sign**.

Discussion topic signs may use ANY means to display discussion topics, discussion themes or conversation themes. Discussion topic signs may for example be: - electronic (e.g. using LED, LCD, plasma displays, VDU monitors or any other form of electronic display), they may be hand-written (e.g. on paper, blackboard, whiteboard or other materials), they may be mechanical or electromechanical or assembled using magnetic or stick-on alphabetical characters, they may be computer generated or optically generated (for example by projection).

Forum groups may be accommodated around or near discussion topic signs or other visual or symbolic means may be used to link discussion topic signs with specific forum groups. Participants are able to join any forum group, to change groups or to set up new ones. **Participants or operators are able to set up new forum groups by displaying new topics on discussion topic signs.** Discussion topic signs may be amended to display new discussion topics, discussion themes or conversation themes. Discussion topic signs may be operated and amended by any known means such as: through a keyboard, by handwriting, by erasing, through a computer mouse, by touch screen, by assemblage of alphabetical characters and so on.

In a slightly different embodiment of the invention more than one topic may be displayed on the same **discussion topic sign**; This sort of **discussion topic sign** may take the form of a map, diagram of the forum or a chart which can be used to indicate what is being discussed by more than one forum group.

The following communication protocols are important features of preferred embodiments of this invention: (1) A discussion topic sign is used to indicate the type of discussion or conversation that members of a forum group wish to pursue. (2) Information displayed on discussion topic signs can be altered, replaced or otherwise amended. (3) A new forum group can be set up by displaying a new topic or theme on a discussion topic sign.

In another embodiment of the invention, audio or video discussion topic signs are used instead of text based discussion topic signs. These audio or video discussion topic signs consist of messages which are used to identify the discussion topic or theme or conversation topic or theme that is associated with a specific forum group.

Forum groups discussing similar types of subject may also be clustered into named **topic zones**. This may be achieved by visually or physically linking together forum groups into zones. For example, forum groups may be physically clustered together into a **topic zone** which is named by some form of sign. Names of zones may be fixed or changeable.

**Topic zones** may be fixed or changeable in terms of the number of forum groups they contain. This may be achieved by colour coding. For example, forum groups may be seated at tables which may each be lit in different colours. Changeable topic zones can be created by lighting tables in the same zone in the same colour. Names of topic zones may be changed by changing the sign associated with that topic zone.

In another embodiment of the invention the programmable forum may be divided into named topic zones but may not utilize discussion topic signs to identify forum groups.

Information technology and appropriate software may be provided for electronic voting on propositions as well as voting to determine the choice of discussion topics. Databases of discussion topics may be compiled as well as archives of quotes and proceedings of forum group discussions.

An Internet website may also be provided to broadcast current and future discussion topics. The website may also be used to facilitate: voting on propositions, voting to determine the choice of discussion topics, archiving and retrieval of quotes and proceedings of forum group discussions.

Clearly, this invention will have many different possible embodiments including those that arise from combinations and sub-combinations of the systems and methods described thus far.

The invention may also function as any of the following or as any combination or sub-combination of the following: A restaurant or a café or an Internet café or a bar or public house or nightclub or shop or community centre or social club or waiting room or sports centre or leisure centre or entertainment centre or recreational facility or other public or private space or conference facility or broadcasting venue or market research centre.

## DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Figures 1,2 and 3 show one possible embodiment of the invention in which forum groups are accommodated at loosely tessellated hexagonal tables. Figure 1 shows a table 1 and an electronic discussion topic sign 2 which is operated by a keyboard 3. Figure 2 shows an areal view of the forum (this is of course not a scale diagram and spaces between tables would be greater than the appearance of the diagram suggests). Fig. 2 shows hexagonal tables 1 that are grouped into topic zones that are named by topic zone signs 4. Surfaces of tables in the same topic zone are lit in the same colour. A table adjacent to a zone may therefore be added to a topic zone by illuminating its surface in the colour that codes for that zone. Electronic discussion topic signs are also connected to a large display unit Fig 3 which provides an overview of the whole programmable forum and shows what is being discussed at each table.

Figures 4 and 5 show another embodiment of the invention in which forum groups are not divided into separate topic zones. Figure 4 shows a discussion topic sign 2 which is made of whiteboard surrounded by circular seating 5 to accommodate a forum group. Figure 5 provides an overview of the whole facility.

Figures 6, 7 show another embodiment of the invention that uses only one discussion topic sign. Figure 6 provides an overview of the programmable forum in which forum groups are accommodated at tables, which are grouped into fixed topic zones.



Figure 7 shows a discussion topic sign that includes a diagram of the forum; Topics or themes may be written on the diagram to identify them with specific tables and hence with forum groups. Figure 8 shows a discussion topic sign that may be used as an alternative to the one depicted in figure 7. This discussion topic sign uses a variety of visual and symbolic methods to identify topics or themes with forum groups. Some tables in figure 6 are labelled using alphabetic and non alphabetic symbols, other tables are identified visually; Topics or themes may be written on the chart (figure 8) to identify them symbolically or visually with specific tables and hence they may be identified with specific forum groups. Any of the visual or symbolic methods depicted in figure 8 may be used on their own or in combination to identify topics or themes with forum groups.

Many other embodiments of this invention may be produced using combinations and sub-combinations of the methods and systems identified by the drawings (figures 1 to 8) that are described here.

Clearly this invention has a huge number of possible embodiments other than those depicted by these drawings. This invention has a huge number of possible embodiments other than those that may be derived from combinations or sub-combinations of the systems and methods depicted by these drawings.



## CLAIMS

1. What is claimed is a programmable forum facility that includes discussion topic signs; This invention is a facility that enables participants to meet (in person), talk and exchange ideas within a structured and modifiable framework;  
In the context of this invention a forum group is defined as a group of participants who wish to pursue a particular discussion or conversation; Embodiments of this invention are set up in such a way as to enable participants to gather together to form forum groups; Accommodation may therefore be provided to enable members of forum groups to sit together;  
Discussion topic signs are arranged within embodiments of this invention in such a way that they indicate the type of discussion or conversation that forum groups wish to pursue; Discussion topic signs are used to display discussion topics or themes or conversation topics or themes; Discussion topic signs may use any means, any materials or any form of technology to display these things;  
Discussion topic signs are arranged within embodiments of this invention in such a way that it is possible for forum groups to gather around them or near them or other visual or symbolic means are used to link specific discussion topic signs with specific forum groups; Discussion topic signs are set up in such a way that participants or forum operators can set up new forum groups by displaying new topics on them;  
This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
2. A facility as claimed in Claim 1 that utilises the following communication protocols:  
(1)Text displayed on a discussion topic sign is used to indicate the type of discussion or conversation that members of a forum group wish to pursue; (2) Text displayed on discussion topic signs can be altered, replaced or otherwise ammended; (3) A new forum group can be set up by displaying a new topic on a discussion topic sign; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
3. A facility as claimed in Claim 1 or Claim 2 wherein discussion topic signs may relate to more than one forum group or even to all forum groups; Embodiments of this invention may use one or more of this sort of discussion topic sign; This type of discussion topic sign may use a diagram of the forum, map, chart or other visual or symbolic display to identify specific forum groups with specific discussion topics or to identify specific forum groups with specific discussion themes or to identify specific forum groups with specific conversation themes; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.

4. A facility as claimed in Claim 1 or Claim 2 or Claim 3 that uses audio or video messages as discussion topic signs instead of text based discussion topic signs; Audio or video discussion topic signs are used to identify specific forum groups with specific discussion topics or to identify specific forum groups with specific discussion themes or to identify specific forum groups with specific conversation themes; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
5. A facility as claimed in any preceding claim wherein forum groups discussing similar types of subject are grouped into named **topic zones**; Names of topic zones may be fixed or changeable; Forum groups may be physically clustered together in the same place to constitute a **topic zone** which is named by some form of sign; Topic zones may also be created by surrounding forum groups in the same zone with a visual or physical boundary; Topic zones may also be created by linking forum groups by visual association – this may, for example, be achieved by colour coding; **Topic zones** may be fixed or changeable in terms of the number of forum groups they contain; For example, forum groups may be seated at tables which may each be lit in different colours and changeable topic zones can be created by lighting tables in the same zone in the same colour; Names of topic zones may be changed by changing the sign associated with that zone; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
6. A programmable forum that is divided into named topic zones as claimed in claim 5 that does not utilize discussion topic signs; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
7. Any programmable forum as described herein with reference to figures 1-8 of the accompanying drawings; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
8. Any programmable forum that may be derived from combinations and sub-combinations of the methods and facilities described with reference to figures 1-8 of the accompanying drawings; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
9. A facility as claimed in any preceding claim that provides Information Technology and appropriate software for any of the following or any combination or sub-combination of the following: electronic voting on propositions, electronic voting to determine choice of discussion topics, the compilation of databases of discussion topics, the archiving and retrieval of quotes and proceedings of forum group discussions; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.

10. A facility as claimed in any preceding claim that provides an Internet website for any of the following or any combination or sub-combination of the following: to broadcast current or future discussion topics, voting on propositions, voting to determine choice of discussion topics, the compilation of databases of discussion topics, the archiving and retrieval of quotes and proceedings of forum group discussions; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
11. A facility that uses any combination or sub-combination of the systems or processes or facilities claimed in Claim 1 or Claim 2 or Claim 3 or Claim 4 or Claim 5 or Claim 6 or Claim 7 or Claim 8 or Claim 9 or Claim 10; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.
12. A facility as claimed in any preceding claim that also functions as any of the following or that also functions as any combination or sub-combination of the following: A restaurant or a café or an Internet café or a bar or public house or nightclub or shop or community centre or social club or waiting room or sports centre or leisure centre or entertainment centre or recreational facility or other public or private place or conference facility or broadcasting venue or market research facility; This claim claims the invention itself as well as the process that the invention makes possible.

**ABSTRACT****A SMALL-SCALE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM**

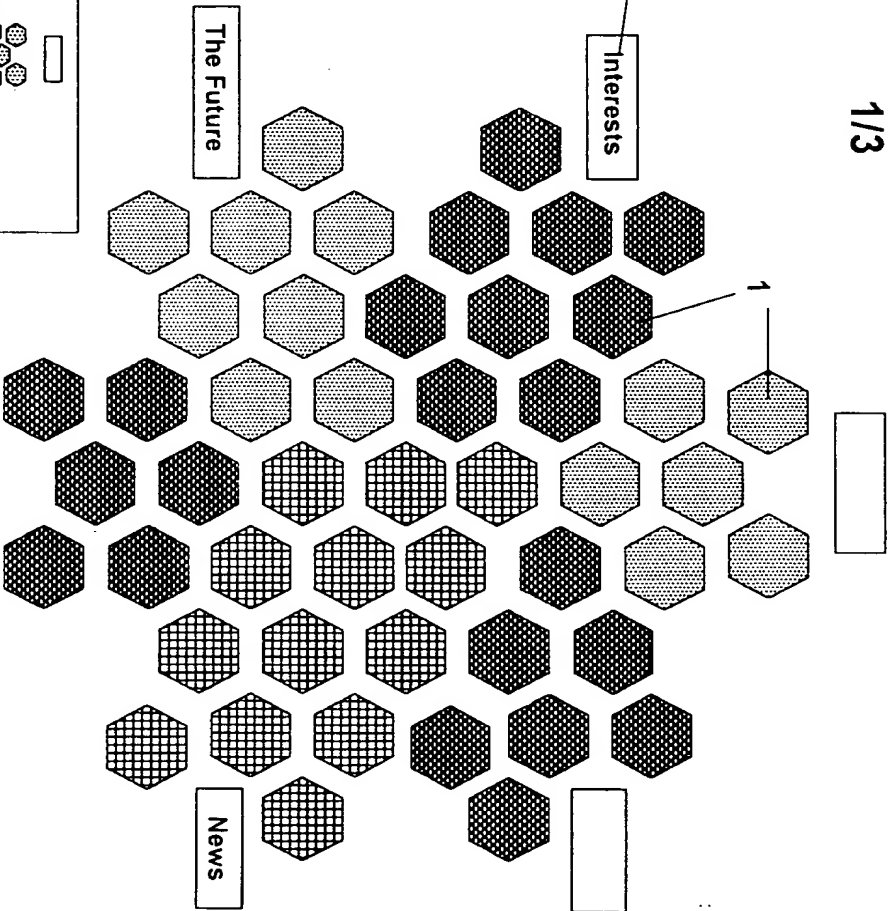
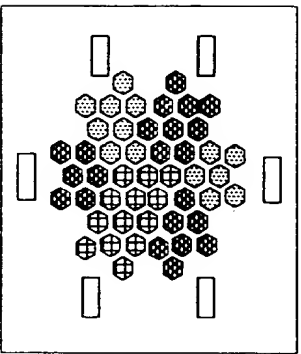
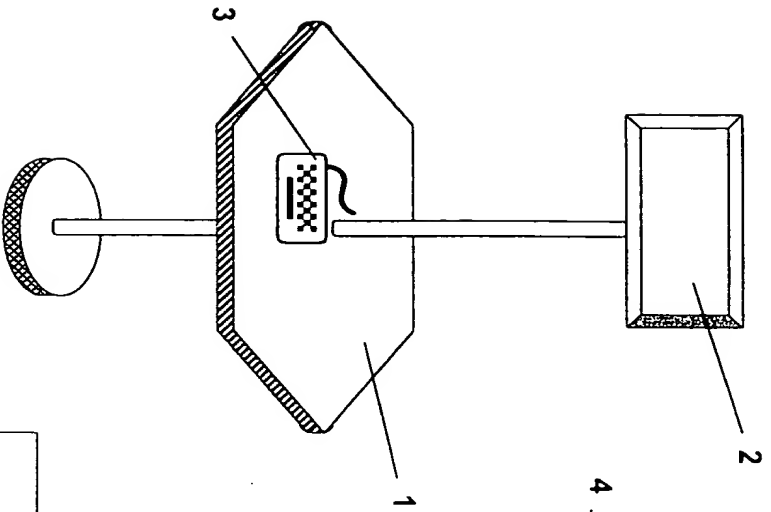
This invention provides a new way to facilitate meetings, conferences and forums. It is a facility that enables participants to meet (in person), talk and exchange ideas within a structured and modifiable framework. The invention is a programmable forum that includes discussion topic signs.

Forum groups consist of participants who wish to pursue a particular type of conversation or discussion. In embodiments of this invention participants are able to gather together to constitute forum groups. In embodiments of this invention each forum group has a discussion topic sign that indicates what is being discussed. Participants are free to join any forum group, to change groups or to set up new ones. A new forum group can be set up by displaying a new topic on a discussion topic sign.

The invention is comprised of facilities and associated communication protocols that together function as a programmable forum.

D. Norris

Daniel Norris 8/2/99



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Fig 4

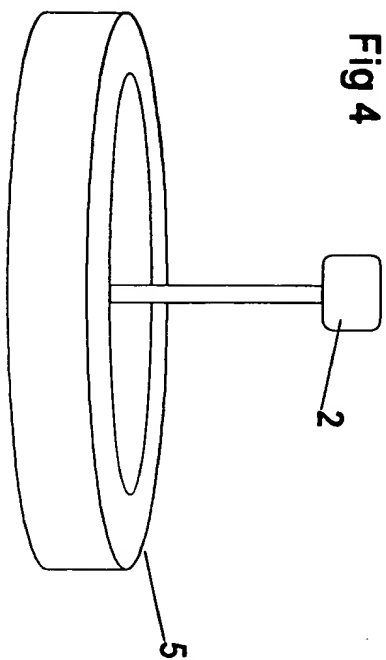
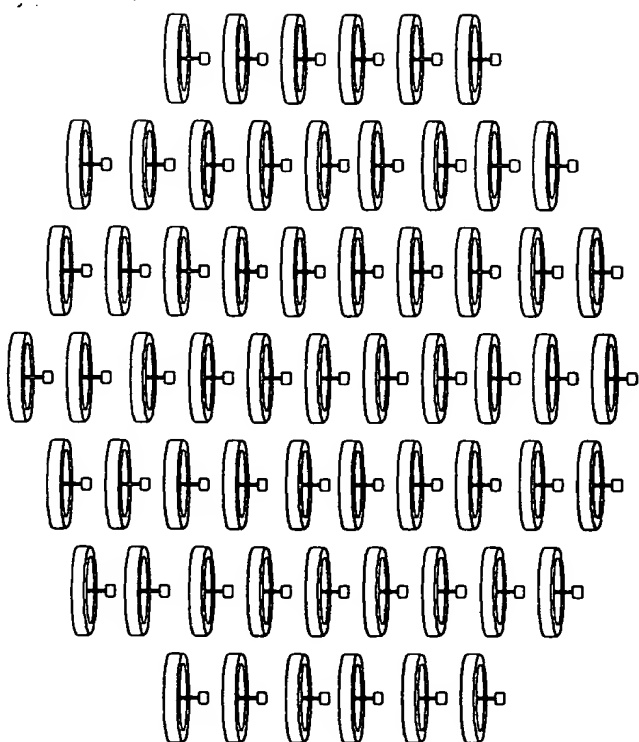
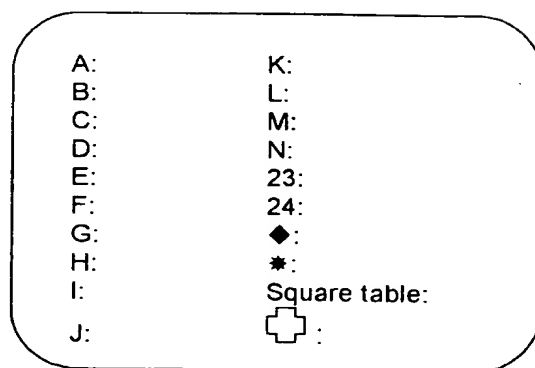
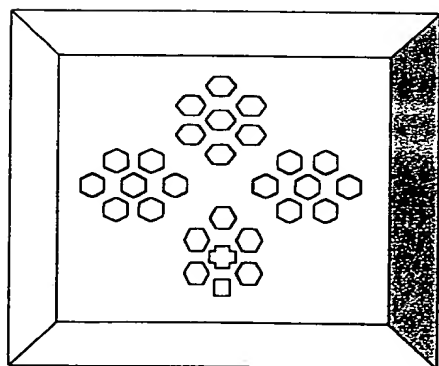
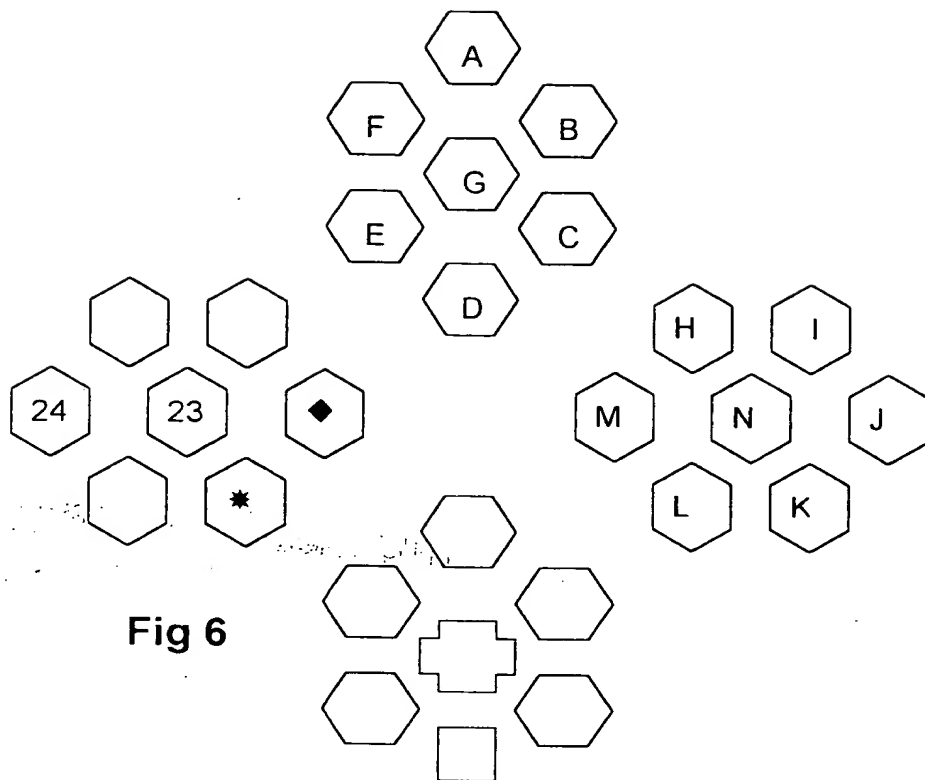


Fig 5



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23/77 filed 7-3-2000

Daniel Norris (applicant)

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